Sun, Sand And Surf...

Posted on



Tourists stroll along the Unawatuna beach lined with restaurants and guest houses

The salty sensual sea lures most of us with its magic. Whenever we are near its fascinating presence we become youngsters, blithe, fun loving, carefree beings of the sun. Unawatuna and Hikkaduwa will do just that…

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Alone crab picked at green algae on the rocks. Salty waves passionately embraced the rocks adorned with small clams. Shorewards, waves lapped gently onto the shallow sand creating a peaceful ambiance, perfect for wallowing. This was Unawatuna beach, where we always find a safe retreat to deliciously lose ourselves amidst the turquoise waters, sand, splashes of sunlight, infinity and observe life flowing around. And, here we were again to explore its golden beaches.

As we walked along the beach, the general feeling of ease and playful joy greeted us. Two young men were playing a game of beach footy, a father was trying to teach an overly eager son how to breath underwater. A woman reading a book on a deck chair lifted her head up from time to time and smiled at a bunch of spluttering, giggling children playing at being water babies. Unawatuna is a cosy haven for safe swimming, snorkelling and even scuba diving as the double reef enclosing the beach, breaks down the impact of the waves. The reef shelters myriads of marine species forming an effervescent world of its own. For these very reasons the Unawatuna beach draws both local and foreign long-timers who have come to love this part of the world dearly, as well as new comers. Many we spoke to had visited Unawatuna before and plan to do so in the future. The innumerable resorts, hotels, restaurants and small stalls selling various goodies paid tribute to this popularity.

As the day’s activities began to gain pace, a stream of vendors carrying odd trinkets made of coconut and seashells, vibrant beach-wear and even carved statues flowed onto the beach. A man carrying a beautiful, sleek python approached us but as my squeamish friends took a detour, I ran behind them to catch up. We wandered ahead absorbing the leisurely but pulsating life around us and headed towards the street beyond the beach.

Located within a short distance from the Unawatuna beach, Thambapanni Retreat is a world apart from the beach, surrounded by tropical greenery and set in a natural rock boulder. The hotel is a retreat indeed, amidst its tranquil foliage where visitors can meditate, practice Yoga and Reiki and indulge in the hotel’s luxurious Ayurvedic treatments.

The sea’s irresistible force has spread to the streets in Unawatuna. They were dotted with a kaleidoscope of guest houses and seafood restaurants bearing both typical and peculiar names. A quaint shop sold coconut shell accessories and the talkative proprietor entertained the customers with his fascinating tales. We revelled in the soothing charm of this enchanting cove and its snug surrounding, reluctant to leave.

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About two miles south of Unawatuna is Nico’s Bistro and Beach Club. The relaxing, laid-back restaurant is charmingly designed with its variety of seating areas and colourful sails creating marquees over tables. What is most exceptional about the restaurant however, is the food. Using only local produce, Nico’s specialises in a unique brand of seafood that melds chiefly Mediterranean flavours with a Sri Lankan twist. The restaurant also serves up an array of desserts from cheese cakes to panna cotta.

Next we headed north on the second part of our expedition – Hikkaduwa. Along the way however, we decided to make a pit-stop at the Dutch Fort in Galle, a quaint, little locale with a distinctive old-world charm. Stepping into the Dutch Wall Arcade, an antique store, we found that it exemplifies the curious quality of the Dutch Fort. Filled to the brim with the most unusual artefacts, we couldn’t help but exclaim in delight at every turn. There were ancient-looking daggers and knives, brightly coloured lamps and chandeliers as well as a host of antique furniture.

A few minutes from the Dutch Fort is the Lighthouse Hotel, a luxurious lodging by a rocky beach. Along the spiralling stairway at the entrance is a stunning sculpture of the invasion of the Portuguese. The outdoor sitting area on the first level leads down to the beach strewn with large boulders through which ocean waves flow to create natural jacuzzis. The sumptuous hotel also offers a choice of three restaurants to dine at.

A twenty-minute drive northward on the Galle-Colombo road, and we had reached Hikkaduwa. Although on the surface the lures of both Hikkaduwa and Unawatuna seem similar – sun, sea, sand, relaxation – there is a marked difference in the spirit of the two towns. In Hikkaduwa, we felt an all-embracing sense of vastness and vigour. The sound of ocean waves created the ideal background to strains of pulsating techno and relaxing lounge music emerging from countless beachside

restaurants, bars, guest houses and hotels.

Unlike the encircling cove of Unawatuna, the beach here is long and wide. The ocean waves here are more potent. Handled with caution and sound judgement however, they become the source of a more rough-and-tumble type of play. We watched several miniature-looking surfers being picked up by waves and sped towards shore, only to be dunked into the bubbling waters. Unfazed and eager to show off their ‘air drops’ and ‘bottom turns’ to the willing audience on the beach, they broke the surface and paddled back out to sea. Many others had waded out to sea and commenced diving into the curling blue-green waters.

Walking along the beach we felt it was the playful spirit of the ocean that gave life to the activity that buzzed around Hikkaduwa. There was no escaping the merry, holiday feel along the beach, from Wewala through Tiranagama to Narigama.

If a little peace and quiet is what is required however, a short distance from this buzzing beach is Aditya, a hotel with 12 luxurious suites hidden away on a secluded stretch of coast. Each suite is unique in layout and is adorned with distinctive art and antiques. Here is the quiet indulgence of a private plunge pool, spa treatments performed in-suite and gourmet breakfasts served on the beach. And located only a few minutes away is the bubbly seaside life of Hikkaduwa.

Having spent an exciting day enjoying the beaches of Unawatuna and Hikkaduwa, we soon discovered that nightfall on the Hikkaduwa beach is a magical time. Above us, patches of deep blue sky peeked through little gaps in the clouds. Before us, little fishing boats lined the horizon, their lamps creating a picturesque string of brilliant dots in the fading light. On land, the beachside restaurants and hotels, now lit up, shimmered merrily against the darkening sky. Moved to a sense of blissful contentment by the sights surrounding us, we mused that perhaps this is the same feeling that the lively, beachside town of Hikkaduwa incites in so many holiday-makers whose hearts it has captivated.

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